

## North Korea's National Security Strategy and Its Impact on Development

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### Abstract

National security is of paramount importance for North Korea due to the continuous hostilities between North and South Korea and the external threats posed by other nations. The military tension between North and South Korea has increased significantly with the launch of North Korea's third nuclear test in February 2013. North Korea has attempted to justify and legitimize its nuclearization process as a self-defense mechanism which is essential for national security.

Even though national security is defined at three different levels: individual, the state, and the international system, in North Korea, individual level gains priority over the others since the regime maintenance of the Kims is considered to be a critical factor in the nation's survival. North Korean aspiration for reunification, considered to be achievable partially by reducing U.S. influence on the Korean Peninsula, and its commitment to perpetuating the Kim family regime has remained unchanged since the nation's founding in 1948. But, the strategies to achieve the same have evolved significantly and resulted in its nuclearization process posing a security challenge for the United States and its allies.

The objective of the study was to identify and assess different types of risks caused by North Korea's national security strategy which will have an impact on the development of North Korea. Secondary data was used to identify the various risks. These risks were assessed using a risk assessment matrix.

It was revealed that certain strategic measures such as the high resource allocation for defense activities are extremely high risks posing an adverse threat to the economic growth of North Korea. Several other high, moderate and low risks were also identified. Based on the findings of the risk identification and assessment process, it is evident that North Korea's national goal of building a "Strong and Prosperous State" has become a challenge.

**Key words:** *National security, Nuclearization process, Development, Defense activities*

## **Introduction**

Since the Korean peninsula functions as the hub of Northeast Asia, establishment of peace in the Korean peninsula is a prerequisite in securing stability in the region. North Korea's third nuclear test conducted on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2013 drew the attention of the international community to the Korean Peninsula. The test being conducted on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2013 right after the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2087 on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2013 condemning North Korea's launch of ballistic missile technology, it was anticipated that the stability and the security of the region would be at a risk. In brief, the North Korean nuclear issue is yet to be resolved, the military tension along the demarcation line is yet to be eased safely and mutual understanding and cooperation between North and South Korea is yet to be enhanced vigorously. Thus, undoubtedly peace in Korea is fragile and volatile.

Not only the third nuclear experiment in North Korea but also the process of stabilizing the new leadership under Kim Jong-Un who became the leader of North Korea in 2011 after Kim Jong-Il's death has significantly contributed towards 2013 being identified as a milestone in North Korean history. These dynamics have necessitated the establishment of a national security strategy which is in alignment with the national goals of North Korea.

## **Salient Features of North Korea's National Security Strategy**

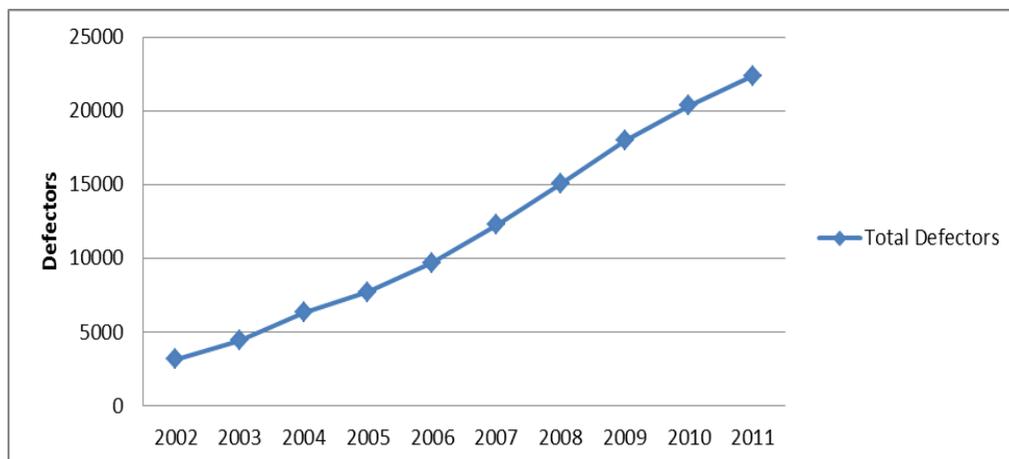
National security is a prime concern of any country in the world. Thus, 'national security' is a widely used concept which is highly controversial in its application. In the 1950s, Wolfers defined security as "an absence of threat to acquired values". According to Baldwin, security is "a low probability of damage to acquired values". Based on these definitions, national security could be defined as a nation's ability to protect its values against internal and external threats. In the modern world, any country should be able to deal with both internal and external threats in various senses and degrees. In doing so, North Korea has followed its national security strategy which could be analyzed as follows with reference to its salient features.

## **North Korean Security Perceptions**

North Korean perceptions regarding national security has been influenced by a number of historical incidents such as the anti-colonial struggle against the

Japanese, political and economic isolation, experience during the cold war, and the constant threats posed by the international community. Consequently, threats to North Korean national security have been defined as internal threats and external threats. The opposition within the country to the leadership succession process has been identified by North Korea as the main internal threat to national security. Due to the lack of confidence on Kim Jong-Un's leadership within the elites and the public consensus, the stabilization of the new leadership has become a tedious task. Furthermore, the political, economic and social instability of the country has compelled North Koreans to flee to South Korea. As indicated in Figure 1, there are 22,371 North Korean defectors living in South Korea at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2011. The increasing number could be identified as an indication of internal instability which has already become a serious concern in North Korea's security perception.

Figure 1: Total North Korean Defectors in South Korea



Source: ROK Ministry of Unification

North Korea's international security perceptions revolve around South Korea and USA which are assumed to be constant threats to North Korea's sovereignty. Hence, the security strategy is focused on addressing possible threats from these parties while dealing with the possible challenges caused by isolation from the international community such as lack of international support even in case of an emergency similar to the severe famine faced by North Korea in 1994.

### **Continuous Militarization Process**

Regime maintenance in the Korean peninsula has been the consistent strategic objective of North Korea but the course of action intended in achieving this objective has experienced a transformation process. During the 1960s and 70s, national power of North Korea was derived from a combination of economic, military and social factors. On the contrary, in the modern days military strength gains priority over the other factors in North Korea due to the political isolation and significant economic deprivation. Hence, North Korea is engaged in a continuous militarization process based on “military first policy” which they assume to be a key determinant in achieving an enhanced perceived national power status.

‘The Korean People’s Army (KPA) – an umbrella organization comprising ground, air, naval, missile, and special operations forces – ranks in personnel numbers as the fourth largest military in the world. Four to five percent of North Korea’s 24 million people serve on active duty, and a further 25-30 percent are assigned to a reserve or paramilitary unit and subject to wartime mobilization (Military and Security Developments Involving the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea , 2013).

Even though it is argued that the North Korean forces have displayed very limited modernization efforts purely based on the lack of investment on new arms purchases, North Korea has invested heavily on ballistic missile development programs. The ongoing ballistic missile development program has already deployed mobile theater ballistic missiles (TBM) capable of reaching targets throughout Korea, Japan, and the Pacific theater and is currently developing the TD-2, which could reach parts of the United States. Moreover, North Korea has continuously invested in nuclear tests and biological and chemical weapons. North Korean forces are regularly trained in chemical defense operations as a precautionary measure. Thus, it is evident that the continuous militarization process is an important characteristic of North Korea’s national security strategy.

### **North Korean Leadership Succession Process and Its Ideological Focus**

North Korea initiated the official leadership succession process from Kim Jong-Il to Kim Jong- Un in 2010 by promoting him as a four star General. Subsequently, he was appointed as a member of the Central Committee of the Worker’s Party and Vice Chair of the Central Military Committee at the Korean Worker’s Party (KWP) Representatives Convention. Consequently, he was granted authority over the Korean Workers’ Party and the military. In 2012, Kim Jong-Un was elected as the first chairman of National Defense

Commission during the twelfth Supreme People's Assembly and finally he became the leader of North Korea after the death of Kim Jong-Il which led to a number of controversies both in the local and global context. An immediate critical value for North Korea is maintaining the total hegemony of the leadership of Kim Il-Sung and his heirs.

Although national security could target three different levels; individual, state and the international system, North Korean National security strategy appears to focus on the individual level because North Korea considers the regime maintenance of the Kims to be equivalent to national survival. Its national security strategy is designed having considered the whims and fancies of Kims, their closest aides, military and the Korean Worker's Party which together form the core group of the state. North Korea's proposal to address the needs of the commoners has been long abandoned by the power groups in the country which has led to disappointment and frustration among the general public.

North Korea's founding ideology called 'Juche' is still considered to be the main concept behind its national security strategy. According to Kim Il-Sung, 'Juche' means the independent stance of rejecting dependence on others and of using one's own powers, believing in one's own strength and displaying the revolutionary spirit of self-reliance. Kim Jong-Un has already identified himself as a follower of Juche ideology.

### **Risks Arising from North Korea's National Security Strategy**

The probability of a negative outcome occurring as a consequence of the course of action followed by North Korea to protect its values against internal and external threats could be identified as a risk arising from North Korea's national security strategy. Having examined the prominent characteristics of the North Korean national security strategy, the following factors could be identified as possible risks arising from North Korea's national security strategy.

### **Impact on Economic and Social Development**

North Korea has invested heavily on national security following the continuous militarization process. As indicated in Table 1, it has been spending 15-16% of total budget on defense activities.

Table 1: Defense Expenditure as a % of the budget

<b>Year</b>	<b>Defense Expenditure as a % of the budget</b>
2005	15.90%
2006	16.00%
2007	15.70%
2008	15.80%
2009	15.80%
2010	15.80%
2011	15.80%

Source: Annual Budget Estimation of Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Continuous allocation of a considerable proportion of the national budget for defense activities could lead to a reduction in economic and social developments of North Korea in the long- term which could adversely affect the living conditions of the North Koreans. When analyzing the data related to the recent past it is evident that it could be classified as a frequent risk of which the consequences are highly critical.

### **Identification of South Korea and USA to be Constant Challenges**

North Korean Security Perceptions are such that South Korea and USA are considered to be constant challenges to North Korea's national security. As a result, North Korea attempts to maintain its distance in dealing with USA and more importantly tries to surpass South Korea in terms of the military strength. Moreover, there are instances where North Korea has violated international treaties and other commonly accepted ethical guidelines. Even in case of an emergency such as Arduous March they lack support from the international community and have to deal with the problem on its own with the limited support received from countries such as China. Thus, identification of South Korea and USA as constant challenges to North Korea's security could be classified as a frequent risk but the impact of such isolationism could be low due to the support available from a few countries.

## **Increasing Dissatisfaction and Disappointment of North Koreans Leading to Increasing Number of North Korean Defectors Entering South Korea**

When North Koreans get exposed to the outside world, increasing numbers of people are entering South Korea as refugees due to a number of reasons such as dissatisfaction with the leadership, the quality of life, etc. It enables South Korea to get military and other required information to design strategies and counter strategies in dealing with North Korea. Hence, there is an increasing trend of North Korea losing control over restraining the spread of information. Since the refugees attempt to justify their decision to leave North Korea, there is a tendency of highlighting only the bad side of North Korea which will tarnish the image of the country. In analyzing the probability and impact of such risk, it is evident that the impact of such risk is critical but the probability of occurrence is occasional because there are a number of control mechanisms used by the North Korean government to stop its citizens entering South Korea. Even though a large number of North Koreans are hoping for a future in South Korea, only a few who manage to escape all the rules and regulations and physical controls laid down by the government will manage to enter South Korea.

## **Dissatisfaction over the Ideological Framework of North Korea's Security Strategy Leading to an Internal Conflict**

Survival of the Kim regime being the prime concern of the North Korean security strategy which has paved the way towards ignoring the need of the general public, there is a strong possibility of the general public rising against the leadership and the core group of the country in a similar manner like the French who rose against the aristocrats. The weak solidarity for Kim Jong-Un and mocking pictures and songs of the leader and the military achievements could be considered as signals of such an uprising. Therefore, the probability of an internal conflict between the core group in power and the general public is likely and the impact of such a conflict will also be critical.

## **Adverse Impact on the Image of the Country**

The global view of North Korea is that it is a violent state in the world which pays minimum attention to the needs of the general public. It is considered to be a country dominated by starvation, sickness, homelessness and poverty. The non-compliance of the country with the internationally accepted conventions and ethical guidelines has aggravated this situation. If North Korea continues to

follow the same national security strategy, North Korea's national image is likely to be tarnished even further having a critical adverse impact economically, politically, socially and even culturally.

### Risk Categorization

The probability and impact of the above risks could be summarized as follows.

No	Risk	Probability	Impact
1	Impact on economic and social development due to high resource allocation for defense activities	Frequent	Critical
2	Identification of South Korea and USA to be constant challenges	Frequent	Marginal
3	Increasing dissatisfaction and disappointment of North Koreans leading to an increasing number of North Korean defectors entering South Korea	Occasional	Critical
4	Dissatisfaction over the ideological framework of North Korea's security strategy leading to an internal conflict	Likely	Critical
5	Adverse impact on the image of the country	Likely	Critical

These risks identified in the study were assessed using the following risk assessment matrix.

	Probability that something will go wrong					
	Category	Frequent	Likely	Occasional	Seldom	Unlikely
Severity of Risk	Catastrophic	E	E	H	H	M
	Critical	E	H	H	M	L
	Marginal	H	M	M	L	L
	Negligible	M	L	L	L	L

Source: Texas State University - LBJ Student Center 4-11.1

Risk Definition	
E	Extremely High Risk
H	High risk
M	Moderate risk
L	Low risk

Based on the above analysis of probability and impact the risk assessment matrix could be developed as follows.

	Probability that something will go wrong					
	Category	Frequent	Likely	Occasional	Seldom	Unlikely
Severity of Risk	Catastrophic					
	Critical	1	4,5	3		
	Marginal	2				
	Negligible					

## Conclusion

Since the adverse impact on the economic and social development is caused by the high resource allocation for defense activities, it is of paramount importance that the government strikes a balance between defense expenses and other expenses such as investments for economic development. Even though South Korea and USA are identified as constant challenges to North Korea's national security, North Korea should be extremely careful in countering this threat. North Korea should never violate any treaties or widely accepted customs in the global arena since such violations could lead to a number of adverse outcomes. Rather than trying to control the number of defectors entering South Korea by tightening the physical controls and controlling the public opinion of the local people by use of force, North Korean government should pay attention to the

whims and fancies of the ordinary North Koreans. Then the change in the attitude of the North Koreans will provide solutions to both these risks.

Since the image of North Korea is influenced by a number of economic, social, political and cultural factors, a number of measures could be employed to portray a positive image regarding North Korea among the international community. But, if the North Koreans are unhappy and are of the opinion that their needs are not attended to, the establishment of a positive image regarding North Korea in the global arena will surely be impossible. Furthermore, no matter how much of effort is taken to build a favorable image of North Korea among the international community, arrogant acts of North Korea such as the violation of widely accepted treaties and non-compliance with the guidelines of international organizations (the United Nations) will question the possibility of the establishment of such an image. Thus, dealing with the other risks such as winning the confidence of the North Koreans are pre requisites to overcome the challenge of establishing a favorable image regarding North Korea among the international community. Based on these facts, it could be concluded that an integrated approach should be followed in overcoming the challenges faced by North Korea's National Security Strategy in order to build a “Strong and Prosperous State”

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